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ABSTRACT

A study examined the influence of mode of discourse, experiential demand and gender on quality of student writing. All of the eighth-grade students (125,756) who participated in a statewide assessment of writing during spring 1989 and spring 1990 were included in the study. Eighteen writing tasks were administered during these two years. The writing tasks were classified in terms of mode of discourse (narrative, descriptive, and expository) and also in terms of experiential demand (direct experience, imagined experience, and outside knowledge). A multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with five dependent variables used to assess writing quality (content/organization, style, sentence formation, usage, and mechanics) and three independent variables (mode of discourse x experiential demand x gender). Results indicated that mode of discourse, experiential demand, and gender were significant predictors of writing quality. The quality of writing was more highly rated for females than for males with effect sizes ranging from .33 for content/organization to .49 for mechanics. (Six tables of data and one figure are included and 27 references are attached. One appendix includes the rhetorical specifications for the writing tasks.) (Author/MG)

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WRITING TASKS AND THE QUALITY OF STUDENT WRITING: EVIDENCE FROM A STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT OF WRITING

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the influences of mode of discourse, experiential demand and gender on quality of student writing. All of the eighth-grade students who participated in a statewide assessment of writing during Spring 1989 and Spring 1990 were included in this study (N = 125,756). Eighteen writing tasks were administered during these two years. These writing tasks were classified in terms of mode of discourse (narrative, descriptive and expository) and also in terms of experiential demand (direct experience, imagined experience and outside knowledge). A multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with five dependent variables used to assess writing quality (content/organization, style, sentence formation, usage and mechanics) and three independent variables (mode of discourse x experiential demand x gender). The results of this analysis suggest that mode of discourse, experiential demand and gender are significant predictors of writing quality. The quality of writing was more highly rated for females than for males with effect sizes ranging from .33 for content/organization to .49 for mechanics.

THE INFLUENCES OF MODE OF DISCOURSE, EXPERIENTIAL DEMAND, AND GENDER ON THE QUALITY OF STUDENT WRITING

There are a variety of factors in addition to writing ability that may influence the assessed quality of student essays. Among the factors that can influence the assessed quality of student writing are characteristics of the writing tasks (Ruth & Murphy, 1988), students (Brown, 1986), raters (Coffman, 1971), and assessment procedures (Breland, 1983; White, 1985).As the number of direct writing assessments increases at state (Afflerbach, 1985), national (Applebee, Langer & Mullis, 1985; Applebee, Langer, Jenkins, Mullis & Foertsch, 1990) and international (Gorman, Purves & Degenhart, 1988) levels, it becomes increasingly important to examine the potential confounding influences of these factors. Huot (1990) provides an excellent review of research on the influences of many of these factors within the context of direct writing assessments. This study focuses on two characteristics of the writing tasks (mode of discourse and experiential demand), as well as one student characteristic (gender).

Several studies have examined the influences of mode of discourse on the quality of student writing. Kegley (1986) examined four modes of discourse (description, narration, exposition and persuasion) and concluded that mode of discourse has an effect on the overall assessment of writing competence. The

ordering of discourse modes by difficulty (easy to hard) for the students examined in her study with percent of adequate evaluations in parentheses is as follows: narration (56%), description (43%), exposition (41%) and persuasion (31%). Quellmalz, Capell & Chou (1982) also found that mode of discourse influenced the quality of student writing. Even though a number of studies have found that mode of discourse affects writing quality, it is still not clear why these differences exist. As pointed out by Huot (1990), studies that have examined the relationship between discourse modes and cognitive demand have been disappointing. This led him to concluded that results of studies conducted on discourse modes have been inconclusive.

One interpretive theme running through the research on discourse modes is that students tend to receive higher ratings on familiar and practical writing tasks. This suggests that experiential demand related to the prior knowledge required to respond to a writing task may also be a significant predictor of writing quality. Following Greenberg (1981) as cited in Brossell (1986), experiential demand reflects variation in the demand of the writing tasks from highly personal to impersonal. Several researchers have examined the effects of experiential demand (Brossell & Ash, 1984; Greenberg, 1981; Hoetker & Brossell, 1989), and their results suggest that experiential demand did <u>not</u> have a

significant effect on the assessed quality of student writing. As pointed out by Brossell (1986), these non-significant results "stand in glaring contrast to the assumptions that underlie the professional wisdom attaching to composition topics" (p. 170). This study differs from these earlier studies in terms of the age of the students (eighth graders rather than college students), scoring method used to define writing quality (analytic scoring rather than holistic), and also in terms of context with this study based on statewide data from a high-stakes assessment of writing. Even though the earlier research on experiential demand did not yield significant results, this writing task characteristic is examined in this study because of these three differences.

When gender differences appear in writing quality, they tend to favor females. Although the causal mechanism underlying these gender differences is not clear, earlier research on gender differences in verbal ability summarized by Maccoby & Jacklin (1974) suggest that females have higher verbal ability then males. A recent meta-analysis by Hyde and Linn (1988) has raised questions about this conclusion. Relative to the research problem addressed here, five of the studies examined by Hyde and Linn reported gender differences in writing ability with direct assessments; females received higher ratings than males in four of these studies. Several national assessments of educational progress with eighth

graders have found that females outperform males on writing tasks (Applebee, Langer & Mullis, 1985; Applebee, Langer, Jenkins, Mullis & Foertsch, 1990).

This study differs from previous research on writing quality in several ways. First, although there has been substantial research on the effects of mode of discourse on the quality of student writing, relatively little research has been conducted with operational forms of writing tasks administered as a part of a high-stakes statewide assessment programs. Second, much of the earlier research on the characteristics of writing tasks included a small number of writing tasks in each category; this study includes 18 writing tasks categorized in terms of mode of discourse and experiential demand. Finally, one of the strengths of this study is the large sample size; even relatively small differences should be observable within our sample. The large sample size can also be viewed as a disadvantage. With the increased power of the statistical tests, minor and substantively insignificant differences may be detected. In order to partially address this issue, more stringent critical values based on $p < .01$ are used for all of the statistical tests. Further evidence of the substantive significance of the results is also provided by calculating effect sizes for the gender differences.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine the influences of writing tasks on the quality of writing produced by eighth grade females and males within the context of a statewide writing assessment program. The two specific characteristics of the writing tasks examined here are mode of discourse (narrative, descriptive and expository) and experiential demand (direct experience, imagined experience and outside knowledge). The quality of writing produced by the students is assessed using five domains (content/organization, style, sentence formation, usage, and mechanics). The specific research questions addressed are:

(1) What is the relationship between mode of discourse and the quality of student writing elicited within a statewide assessment?

(2) What is the relationship between experiential demand and the quality of student writing elicited within a statewide assessment?

(3) What is the relationship between gender and the quality of student writing elicited within a statewide assessment?

(4) Are relationships of mode of discourse and experiential demand with quality of writing comparable for eighth grade females and males?

Based on a review of the literature, it is expected that the most highly rated essays will be in response to the narrative writing tasks, next will be descriptive writing tasks, and the lowest rated essays will be the expository writing tasks. The level of writing quality related to experiential demand will range from high to low with writing prompts requiring direct experiences rated the highest, imagined experiences next and outside knowledge the lowest. Females will receive higher ratings than the males regardless of the characteristics of the writing tasks.

Method

Subjects

The total sample consists of 125,756 eighth-grade students who participated in the statewide assessment of writing in Georgia during Spring 1989 and Spring 1990. Students enrolled in private schools were not included in the statewide assessment of writing. Students classified by the local school systems as requiring special education were also eliminated from the study. Forty-nine percent of the students are females.

Instruments

The Basic Skills Writing Test (BSWT) is a criterion-referenced test designed to provide a direct assessment of student writing ability. Students are asked to write an essay of no more than two pages on an assigned writing task. The suggested time limit is one

hour and 15 minutes. The writing tasks are randomly assigned to students, and each student responds to one writing task. Each of the essays is scored analytically using five domains: content/organization, style, sentence formation, usage and mechanics. A detailed description of the domains and the components used to define these domains is presented in Figure 1.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Each essay is judged by two raters and a four-point scale is used (0=inadequate, 1=minimal, 2=good, 3=very good) for each domain. The mean ratings from the two raters based on these domains are used as the five dependent variables in this study. Additional information on the BSWT is available in the Teacher's Guide (Georgia Department of Education, 1990).

The raters are highly trained and a variety of procedures are used to maintain the overall reliability and validity of the ratings. First, the raters must successfully complete an extensive training program; this program typically takes three days. Next, the raters go through a qualifying process in order to become an operational rater. During the qualifying process, each rater rates 20 essays and their ratings are compared with a set of standard ratings assigned by a validity committee of writing experts.

Raters with at least 62 percent exact agreement with the standard and 38 percent adjacent category agreement can become operational raters.

Finally, two ongoing quality control procedures are used to monitor the raters during the actual process of rating student essays. First, validity papers with a set of standard ratings are included in each packet of 24 essays and rater agreement is examined continuously; the raters are unable to identify the validity papers. Second, each essay is rated by two raters, and if a large discrepancy is found, then the essay is re-scored by a third rater. Further details of the training procedures and the ongoing quality control processes are available in the Training Manual (Georgia Department of Education, 1989).

Procedures

The 18 writing tasks were classified a priori into modes of discourse and the experiential demand required to respond to the writing tasks. The rhetorical specifications for the writing tasks include four types of statements: task, elaboration, strategy and focus. Definitions and examples of these types of statements, as well as a complete writing task are presented in the Appendix. The specifications are kept as similar as possible for each of the writing tasks. Although the full rhetorical specification of the writing tasks cannot be revealed here because this is a high-stakes

test, the sample task statements for the writing tasks can be presented. The three modes of discourse examined here with a sample task statement in parentheses are narrative ("where you would go if you won an all expense paid trip"), descriptive ("something you like about yourself") and expository ("discovery or invention that makes life better"). Seven of the writing tasks examined here are classified as narrative, five as descriptive and six as expository.

For the purposes of this study, experiential demand is defined as the knowledge base the writer is assumed to draw upon in order to respond to the assigned writing task. Three categories are used in this study, and the writing tasks can be ordered from demands for highly personal to impersonal responses as follows: direct experience, imagined experience and outside knowledge. For writing tasks in the first category, students are asked to write about a topic that they have personal knowledge about and are likely to have directly experienced (direct experience); "favorite place to think" is an example of a task statement for writing tasks is this category. For the second category, students are asked to write about a topic that they have <u>not</u> directly experienced, but are likely to be able to imagine happening to them (imagined experience); "what you would do with a million dollars" is an example of a task statement for writing tasks in this

category. For writing tasks in the final category, students are asked to write about a topic that is not related to personal experiences, either direct or imagined, but requires academic or factual knowledge that tends to be impersonal (outside knowledge); "objects representing the 80's " is an example of a task statement for writing tasks is this category. Eight of the writing tasks examined here are classified as requiring direct experience, six require an imagined experience and four require outside knowledge.

The crossing of mode of discourse with experiential demand creates a research design for examining the influence of these two characteristics of writing tasks with at least one writing task in seven of the nine cells. The cross-classification with the number of writing tasks in parentheses is as follows: narrative/direct experience (5), narrative/imagined experience (2), descriptive/direct experience (3), descriptive/imagined experience (1), descriptive/outside knowledge (1), expository/imagined experience (3) and expository/outside knowledge (3). Two of the cells (expository/direct experience and narrative/outside knowledge) are empty by design.

A three-way multivariate analysis of variance (mode of discourse x experiential demand x gender) is used to analyze the data with the scores on the five domains used as the dependent variables. In order to analyze this incomplete design, a

sequential analysis was conducted guided by the research questions using the GLM Procedure in SAS (SAS Institute, Inc., 1985). Since multiple univariate F ratios are not independent, a two-stage procedure for significance testing is used as recommended by Finn (1974). First, Wilks' lambda is used to obtain multivariate F values for examining the influences of each independent variable and the relevant interactions. If these multivariate statistics are significant at the .01 critical value, then the five univariate ANOVAs are examined in order to identify which of the five domains appear to account for the significant multivariate F values. In addition to the multivariate and univariate tests, Scheffe's procedure for multiple comparisons is used to examine mean differences when the univariate F values are significant. Since the sample size is so large, effect sizes (ESs) are also calculated in order to determine the substantive significance of the differences between males and females. The ESs are defined as the differences between the means of the females minus the means of the males divided by the within cell standard deviations for the males.

Results

The summary of the multivariate and univariate analyses are presented in Table 1. The results of the multivariate analysis

Insert Table 1 about here

indicate that mode of discourse has a significant effect on the quality of student writing (Wilks' lambda = .977, $p < .01$). Experiential demand, after controlling for mode of discourse, also has a significant effect on writing quality (Wilks' lambda = .996, $p < .01$). The strongest effect, as indicated by the relative size of the F values obtained, is the gender effect; gender has a significant effect on the quality of student writing and this effect is significant after controlling for mode of discourse and experiential demand (Wilks' lambda = .941, $p < .01$). All three of the two-way interactions are statistically significant, while the three-way interaction effect is not significant.

The results of the univariate analyses indicate that mode of discourse has a significant effect on all of the five domains with the largest F values obtained for content/organization, $F(2, 125,742) = 533.3$, $p < .01$, and style, $F(2, 125,742) = 776.7$, $p < .01$. The effects of mode of discourse on the other three domains is somewhat smaller, although still statistically significant. The results of Scheffe's tests for multiple comparisons are presented in Table 2. Although this pattern of statistically significant mean differences is somewhat different by domain,

Insert Table 2 about here

it is clear that narrative writing tasks tend to elicit more highly rated essays than descriptive and expository writing tasks; descriptive writing tasks also tend to elicit more highly rated essays than expository writing tasks. For the first two domains, content/organization and style, the mean ratings are all significantly different across discourse modes. For the last three domains, sentence formation, usage and mechanics, the mean contrasts between narrative and descriptive writing tasks are not statistically significant. The means for these three domains for the expository essays are significantly lower than those for both the narrative and descriptive writing tasks.

Turning now to the univariate analyses for experiential demand, the data indicate that experiential demand has a significant effect on writing quality, after controlling for mode of discourse, in all of the domains except mechanics. The two largest F values are obtained for content/organization, $F(2, 125,742) = 44.0$, $p < .01$, and style, $F(2, 125,742) = 76.2$, $p < .01$. The results of Scheffe's multiple comparison tests are presented in

Insert Table 3 about here

Table 3. As expected, the data indicate that the most highly rated essays are elicited by writing tasks that require direct experiences. The next most highly rated essays are those requiring imagined experiences, and the lowest rated essays are those requiring outside knowledge. Although the pattern of statistically significant mean differences varies somewhat across the five domains, the general ordering by experiential demand is the same across domains.

The effects of gender on writing quality, after controlling for mode of discourse and experiential demand, are statistically significant in all of the five domains with the largest F values appearing for sentence formation, usage and mechanics. Overall, the effect sizes (ESs) are quite substantial with females writing more highly rated essays than males in content/organization (ES = .33), style (ES = .33), sentence formation (ES = .36), usage (ES = .38) and mechanics (ES = .49).

In order to interpret the interactions between mode of discourse and experiential demand, the means and standard deviations for essays classified into these two categories were calculated. These results are presented in Table 4.

Insert Table 4 about here

The interaction effect is most evident for content/organization with style and sentence formation also being statistically significant. For narrative and expository writing tasks, the ordering by writing quality from high to low is direct experience, imagined experience and outside knowledge, while for descriptive writing tasks the ordering is reversed (outside knowledge, imagined experience and direct experience). The interactions for style and sentence formation are not as easily interpretable, but also reflect differences in the ordering of the quality of essays by experiential demand for descriptive writing tasks.

In order to examine the interaction between gender and mode of discourse, the means, standard deviations and effect sizes were calculated. These results are presented in Table 5. The

Insert Table 5 about here

interactions between gender and mode of discourse indicate that the mean differences in writing quality between males and females on all five domains are dependent on the mode of discourse; narrative essays tend to have larger gender differences than descriptive and expository essays, and descriptive essays tend to

have larger gender differences than expository essays. This interaction effect is ordinal with females always receiving higher mean ratings than males for each mode of discourse.

The interactions between gender and experiential demand can also be interpreted in a similar fashion. The means, standard deviations and effect sizes are presented in Table 6. The data

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Insert Table 6 about here

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clearly suggest that gender differences vary as a function of experiential demand; the ordering from larger to smaller gender differences is from direct experience through imagined experience to outside knowledge. As with mode of discourse, the interaction effects between gender and experiential demand are ordinal with females always receiving higher mean ratings than males regardless of experiential demand.

Discussion

The results of this study suggest that, even though the effects tend to be small, the two characteristics of the writing tasks examined here are related to the assessed quality of student writing. For mode of discourse, narrative writing tasks tend to produce the most highly rated essays with descriptive writing tasks next and expository writing tasks receiving the lowest ratings.

Experiential demand also has a significant effect on writing quality. As expected, writing tasks that require more personal responses (direct and imagined experiences) tend to elicit essays that receive higher ratings than writing tasks that require impersonal or outside knowledge. Gender is also a significant predictor of writing quality with females producing more highly rated essays than males.

There are a number of strengths and limitations associated with this study that should be kept in mind before interpreting the results. One of the strengths of this study is that operational writing tasks are used from a statewide assessment. Another strength is that a wide variety of writing tasks are used with several writing tasks in some of the categories. Finally, the large sample size provides powerful tests of the relationships examined in this study.

The large sample size may also be viewed as a limitation. The increased power of the statistical tests may lead to the identification of statistically significant differences that may lack substantive importance. Another limitation is that this study does not examine the type of writing that is actually produced by the students in responding to the writing tasks classified by mode of discourse and experiential demand; previous research has suggested that students may respond with essays that

do not match the expectations of the test makers (Nold & Freedman, 1977).

With these strengths and limitations in mind, the results of this study indicate that mode of discourse has small, but consistent, relationships with the quality of student writing elicited in a statewide assessment. These differences appeared in all of the five domains (content/organization, style, sentence formation, usage and mechanics).

Contrary to previous research on experiential demand (Brossell & Ash, 1984; Greenberg, 1981; Hoetker & Brossell, 1989), the results of this study suggest that experiential demand has small and statistically significant relationships with the assessed quality of student writing in the five domains examined here. Writing tasks that ask students to write about personal experiences, either direct or imagined, tend to be more highly rated in all five domains than writing tasks based on outside knowledge. Although there is a small interaction effect between the two writing characteristics, the overall relationships of discourse mode and experiential demand to writing quality are still evident.

Perhaps the most interesting findings here are the relationships between gender and writing quality, and the interactions between gender and the two characteristics of the

writing tasks. Females wrote more highly rated essays than males. In terms of the interactions, gender differences appear to be related to mode of discourse and experiential demand. Gender differences become larger as the discourse mode goes from expository to descriptive to narrative writing tasks. Gender differences also become larger as experiential demand moves from writing tasks requiring outside knowledge to those requiring direct or imagined experiences that lead to more personal responses. In terms of the five domains examined here, gender differences appear to be smaller on the content/organization and style domains with larger gender differences observed for sentence formation, usage and mechanics. The first two domains tend to assess student ability to generate and organize ideas, while the last three domains deal more with the "correct" presentation of ideas.

In summary, the results of this study indicate that discourse modes, experiential demands and gender do have an effect on the quality of student writing generated in a statewide assessment of eighth graders. As suggested by Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod & Rosen (1975) and Kinneavy (1971), the differences in task difficulty may be due to the idea that writers think and compose differently when engaged in different kinds of writing tasks. Perhaps writers, just as previous research on readers has suggested (Johnston, 1983), engage different cognitive schemata

depending on the writing task. The influences of cognitive demands required by different writing tasks on the assessed quality of student writing is a promising area for future research; this research would contribute to our understanding of why some writing tasks receive higher ratings than others. Differences in the assessed quality of student writing, may also be due to an interaction effect between essay responses elicited by the writing tasks, and the expectations of the raters (Diederich, 1974). A qualitative study, using think-aloud protocols, would also further our knowledge regarding the interaction between gender and the two writing characteristics examined here.

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Table 1

Summary of Multivariate and Univariate Analyses

Source	Multivariate F value	Univariate F Values C/O	S	SF	U	M
Mode (A)	291.2*	533.3*	776.7*	82.1*	58.4*	12.2*
Demand (B)	50.2*	44.0*	76.2*	14.4*	16.3*	2.7
Gender (C)	1587.9*	3807.4*	3528.5*	4433.4*	4613.8*	7863.6*
A x B	128.0*	302.5*	98.6*	7.8*	1.9	.7
A x C	5.3*	9.9*	11.1*	6.8*	7.6*	2.2
B x C	7.3*	17.5*	7.6*	5.8*	5.2*	1.8
A x B x C	2.2	5.1*	1.3	4.3	1.7	4.3
Mean square error		.48	.49	.53	.51	.52
Multiple R		.21*	.20*	.19*	.19*	.24*

* $p < .01$

Note. The domains are C/O = Content/organization, S = Style, SF = Sentence formation, U = Usage, M = Mechanics. Analyses are based on sequential sums of squares - Type I SS (SAS Institute, Inc., 1985).

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations by Mode of Discourse and Domain

DOMAIN		Mode of Discourse: Narrative	Descriptive	Expository
C/O	Mean	2.71	2.66	2.56
	SD	.71	.71	.70
		A A A A A	B B B B B	C C C C C
S	Mean	2.60	2.56	2.42
	SD	.73	.71	.68
		A A A A A	B B B B B	C C C C C
SF	Mean	2.72	2.72	2.67
	SD	.75	.74	.74
		A A A A A A A A A A		B B B B B
U	Mean	2.68	2.67	2.63
	SD	.73	.73	.72
		A A A A A A A A A A		B B B B B
M	Mean	2.62	2.62	2.60
	SD	.75	.74	.74
		A A A A A A A A A A		B B B B B
	N	53,551	32,593	39,931

Note. The domains are C/O = Content/organization, S = Style, SF = Sentence formation, U = Usage, M = Mechanics. Means connected with the same letter are not significantly different based on Scheffe's test for multiple comparisons.

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations by Experiential Demand and Domain

		Experiential Demand		
DOMAIN		DIRECTEX	IMAGEX	OUTKNOW
C/O	Mean	2.70	2.62	2.61
	SD	.72	.69	.73
		A A A A A	B B B B B B B B B B B	
S	Mean	2.61	2.49	2.46
	SD	.72	.70	.72
		A A A A A	B B B B B	C C C C C
SF	Mean	2.73	2.69	2.68
	SD	.75	.74	.75
		A A A A A	B B B B B B B B B B B	
U	Mean	2.68	2.66	2.62
	SD	.73	.72	.74
		A A A A A	B B B B B	C C C C C
M	Mean	2.62	2.61	2.61
	SD	.74	.74	.75
		A A A A A A A A A A A		
			B B B B B B B B B B B	
	N	52,285	46,823	26,967

Note. The domains are C/O = Content/organization, S = Style, SF = Sentence formation, U = Usage, M = Mechanics. The experiential demand categories are DIRECTEX = Direct experience, IMAGEX = Imagined experience, OUTKNOW = Outside knowledge. Means connected with the same letter are not significantly different based on Scheffe's test for multiple comparisons.

Table 4

Means and Standard Deviations by Mode of Discourse, Experiential Demand, and Domain

		Mode of Discourse					
		Narrative		Descriptive		Expository	
DOMAIN	Demand	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
C/O	DIRECT	2.76	.72	2.61	.70	-	-
	IMAGEX	2.64	.70	2.68	.68	2.58	.68
	OUTKNOW	-	-	2.78	.73	2.55	.72
S	DIRECT	2.64	.73	2.56	.71	-	-
	IMAGEX	2.54	.73	2.52	.67	2.43	.67
	OUTKNOW	-	-	2.63	.76	2.41	.69
SF	DIRECT	2.74	.76	2.73	.73	-	-
	IMAGEX	2.70	.74	2.70	.72	2.67	.73
	OUTKNOW	-	-	2.73	.78	2.66	.74
U	DIRECT	2.68	.74	2.68	.72	-	-
	IMAGEX	2.67	.72	2.66	.73	2.64	.71
	OUTKNOW	-	-	2.66	.78	2.61	.72
M	DIRECT	2.62	.75	2.62	.73	-	-
	IMAGEX	2.61	.75	2.62	.73	2.59	.74
	OUTKNOW	-	-	2.63	.78	2.61	.74

Note. The domains are C/O = Content/organization, S = Style, SF = Sentence formation, U = Usage, M = Mechanics. The experiential demand categories are DIRECTEX = Direct experience, IMAGEX = Imagined experience, OUTKNOW = Outside knowledge.

Table 5

Means, Standard Deviations and Effect Sizes by Mode of Discourse, Gender, and Domain

		Mode of Discourse							
		Narrative		Descriptive		Expository		Total	
DOMAIN	Gender	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
C/O	Female	2.84	.68	2.79	.67	2.67	.66	2.77	.68
	Male	2.59	.72	2.53	.72	2.45	.71	2.53	.72
	Effect size	.35		.36		.31		.33	
S	Female	2.73	.70	2.68	.68	2.53	.65	2.65	.69
	Male	2.47	.74	2.45	.72	2.32	.69	2.41	.72
	Effect size	.35		.32		.30		.33	
SF	Female	2.87	.71	2.86	.69	2.80	.70	2.84	.70
	Male	2.58	.76	2.59	.75	2.54	.74	2.57	.76
	Effect size	.38		.36		.35		.36	
U	Female	2.82	.69	2.82	.69	2.76	.68	2.80	.69
	Male	2.54	.74	2.54	.74	2.50	.73	2.52	.74
	Effect size	.38		.38		.34		.38	
M	Female	2.81	.70	2.80	.68	2.78	.69	2.80	.69
	Male	2.44	.75	2.45	.75	2.43	.75	2.43	.75
	Effect size	.49		.47		.47		.49	

Note. The domains are C/O = Content/organization, S = Style, SF = Sentence formation, U = Usage, M = Mechanics. Effect sizes are based on the differences between the means of the females minus the means of the males divided by the within cell standard deviations for the males.

Table 6

Means, Standard Deviations and Effect Sizes by Experiential Demand, Gender, and Domain

		Experiential Demand							
		DIRECTEX		IMAGEX		OUTKNOW		Total	
DOMAIN	Gender	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
C/O	Female	2.84	.68	2.74	.66	2.71	.70	2.77	.68
	Male	2.57	.72	2.50	.70	2.51	.74	2.53	.72
	Effect size	.38		.34		.27		.33	
S	Female	2.74	.69	2.60	.67	2.57	.69	2.65	.69
	Male	2.48	.73	2.38	.71	2.37	.73	2.41	.72
	Effect size	.36		.31		.27		.33	
SF	Female	2.88	.70	2.82	.70	2.80	.72	2.84	.70
	Male	2.59	.76	2.56	.75	2.56	.76	2.57	.76
	Effect size	.38		.35		.32		.36	
U	Female	2.83	.69	2.79	.68	2.75	.70	2.80	.69
	Male	2.54	.74	2.53	.72	2.51	.75	2.52	.74
	Effect size	.39		.36		.32		.38	
M	Female	2.81	.69	2.78	.69	2.79	.70	2.80	.69
	Male	2.44	.74	2.43	.75	2.44	.76	2.43	.75
	Effect size	.50		.47		.46		.49	

Note. The domains are C/O = Content/organization, S = Style, SF = Sentence formation, U = Usage, M = Mechanics. The experiential demand categories are DIRECTEX = Direct experience, IMAGEX = Imagined experience, OUTKNOW = Outside knowledge. Effect sizes are based on the differences between the means of the females minus the means of the males divided by the within cell standard deviations for the males.

Figure 1. Definitions of domains and components

Domain 1 - Content/Organization (C/O). The writer establishes the controlling idea through examples, illustrations, facts, or details. There is evidence of a sense of order that is clear and relevant.

- o Clearly established controlling idea
- o Clearly developed supporting ideas
- o Sufficiently relevant supporting ideas
- o Clearly discernible order of presentation
- o Logical transitions and flow of ideas
- o Sense of completeness

Domain 2 - Style (S). The writer controls language to establish his or her individuality.

- o Concrete images and descriptive language
- o Easily readable
- o Varied sentence patterns
- o Appropriate tone for topic, audience and purpose

Domain 3 - Sentence formation (SF). The writer forms effective sentences.

- o Appropriate end punctuation
- o Complete sentences or functional fragments
- o Appropriate coordination and/or subordination

Domain 4 - Usage (U). The writer uses standard American English.

- o Clear pronoun references
- o Correct subject-verb agreement
- o Standard form of verbs and pronouns
- o Correct word choice

Domain 5 - Mechanics (M). The writer employs devices necessary in written standard American English.

- o Appropriate capitalization
- o Appropriate internal punctuation
- o Appropriate format
- o Correct spelling

Source: Georgia Basic Skills Writing Test: Teacher's Guide (1990)

Appendix

Rhetorical specifications for writing tasks

Prompts contain four types of statements: TASK, ELABORATION, STRATEGY and FOCUS. The task statement is always a single sentence. The other elements of the prompt may be one or two sentences long.

TASK STATEMENT

The task statement directs the student to write on a specific topic described by a key word or phrase. This phrase or theme, or the student's narrowing of it, serves as the central idea of the student's written response. Task Statements begin with the words "Write about. . . . " and conclude with the theme phrase. For example:

> Write about an experience to remember.

The theme phrase is "an experience to remember."

ELABORATION STATEMENT

The elaboration statement provides examples or a definition of the theme. The intent is to provide a common understanding of the meaning of the theme by expanding, restating, or clarifying the central idea for the student. It is not the intent to preclude the student's narrowing or restating the theme to suit his or her own plan. An example is:

> This could be something that happened to you recently or something that happened in your childhood. It should be the kind of experience that you will never forget.

STRATEGY STATEMENT

The strategy statement is intended to suggest an approach to the topic for those students who might have some difficulty getting started. It provides the beginning of a possible plan for the writer's piece. The strategy statement always begins with the phrase "You might want to spend part of your planning time thinking about. . . ." An example is:

> You might want to spend part of your planning time thinking about an unforgettable experience that you have had. Think about what led up to the experience, what happened, and why you will always remember it.

FOCUS STATEMENT

The focus statement should help the student accumulate the information or content that ought to be delivered. It is also a reminder of the writer's obligation to the reader and the purpose of the paper. The focus statement begins with the phrase "Think about information that will help your reader understand . . . ." For example:

> Think about information that will help your reader understand why this is an experience to remember.

Note: The understood readers or audience are "persons like your teachers."

COMPLETE WRITING PROMPT

Write about an experience to remember. This could be something that happened to you recently or something that happened in your childhood. It should be the kind of experience that you will never forget. You might want to spend part of your planning time thinking about an unforgettable experience that you have had. Think about what led up to the experience, what happened, and why you will always remember it. Think about information that will help your reader understand why this is an experience to remember.

Source: Georgia Basic Skills Writing Test: Teacher's Guide (1990)